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SOPH. ANT. 471 AND AESCHYLUS' OEDIPUS¹*Zoia A. Barzakh*

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The article is dedicated to the interpretation of Soph. *Ant.* 471–2. The main problems posed by these verses are the meaning of the epithet ὤμῶς, the ambiguous reference to Oedipus and the comparison of Antigone to him. Basing on lexicological analysis and interpretation of the context, the author rejects the understanding of ὤμῶς as “savage, uncivilized” which became popular in the last decades. Meanwhile, the author assumes that this extravagant explanation has diagnostic value, and supposes that we cannot fully understand the meaning of these lines, since we do not possess the tragedy they refer to. The author explains these verses as a reference to the lost Aeschylus' *Oedipus*. In this case, the ὤμότης of Oedipus referred to consists in his curse on his sons, who, according to the testimonies of Aeschylus' *Septem* and the Scholia to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, refused to provide proper maintenance for him when he found himself in helpless state in their care. The author prefers this interpretation of *Sept.* 778–87 to the alternative one, which understands τροφή not as “care, maintenance”, but as “origin”. Refs 47.

Keywords: Aeschylus, Antigone, Oedipus, Sophocles, *Seven Against Thebes*.

It is well known that there is no such thing as Sophocles' “Theban trilogy”: at least 35 years have passed between the release of the earliest and the latest Theban play of Sophocles. Moreover, among three tragedies dedicated to the fate of Oedipus' family the first to be written is the one that describes the latest events of the myth, namely *Antigone*. Therefore, it is only natural that we would like to know how Sophocles imagined the hero of two later tragedies when he was writing the earliest one.

Sophocles does not allow us to forget the name of Oedipus, his deeds and sufferings for a single moment throughout the tragedy. Oedipus is mentioned in the very first lines of the prologue (vv. 2–3, cf. 49–52), in the kommos, before Antigone is led to death (853–6), as well as at the moment of culmination, just after Antigone's famous monologue on the unwritten Laws (471–2).

¹ Hereby I express my profound gratitude to the anonymous reviewer of *Philologia Classica*, whose thought-provoking and benevolent remarks helped me greatly in my work on this paper.

In this paper, we will speak about the last passage. The Chorus Leader comments on Antigone's words as follows:

Δηλοῖ τὸ γέννημ' ὦμὸν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρὸς
τῆς παιδός· εἵκειν δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται κακοῖς.

Up to 1980s, the sense of these verses hasn't been discussed, although several conjectures, most of them irrelevant to the meaning, were proposed. Most translators, commentators and readers were content with such translations as "passionate child of passionate sire",² "harsh was a sire, the breed proves harsh no less"³ or «суровый нрав сурового отца».⁴

The situation has changed completely after the publication of the influential book by Oudemans and Lardinois titled *Tragic Ambiguity: Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone* (1987). According to the authors, "the tragic ambiguity" underlying the tragedy's conflict consists in the ambivalent relations between civilization and wild nature. The last is characterized *inter alia* by ὠμότης, which must be understood here as "savageness". Civilization in person of its heroes tries to oppose nature, but at the same time, it is unable to exist without it: so Antigone, who, at first glance, seems to promote the civilized practice of burial, belongs to the world of "savageness", and hence is characterized by the word ὠμός.⁵ Oudemans and Lardinois prove this "savageness" of the girl or even the existence of "sub-human, bestial side" in her nature by the animal metaphors repeatedly used to describe her: the Guard compares her with a bird bewailing her nestlings (422–5), Creon — with a fractious horse who should be restrained by a small bridle (476–9).⁶

Many researchers base rather far-fetched assumptions upon this interpretation. The most consistent development of it belongs to V. Liapis, who understands ὠμότης as "savageness" and declares it the inherited feature of the heroine. This idea perfectly corresponds to Liapis' concept of this tragedy as that of (self-)destructive and "savage" οἶκος, which is opposed to the civilized power of πόλις and endangers it by its mere existence (according to Liapis, by the end of the tragedy even Creon, in contradiction with his own genealogy and ideology, displays the inherited features of this οἶκος).⁷

The above-mentioned interpretation of the passage has become extremely popular among the authors of generalizing writings on human culture. In such papers these verses are cited as a proof of the heroine's characterization as "human-animal hybrid";⁸ her ὠμότης is interpreted as a supposedly inherited proneness to breaking prohibitions and taboos,⁹ or as her willingness to oppose society and civilization,¹⁰ or as her pride,¹¹ or even as her virginity.¹²

² Jebb 1891, 93.

³ Phillimore 1902, 157.

⁴ Russian transl. by S. Shervinsky.

⁵ Oudemans, Lardinois 1987, 90–92; 166–168.

⁶ Ibid. 177; Lardinois 2012, 63.

⁷ Liapis 1997, 342–355; Liapis 2013.

⁸ Robert 2009, 19.

⁹ Blake Tyrell, Bennet 1998, 72.

¹⁰ Robert 2010, 124 and n. 37.

¹¹ McDonald 2008, 28.

¹² Blake Tyrell, Bennet 1998, 96.

The supporters of such theories often refer to the fact that ὤμός initially means “raw”, “crude” (on food, as opposed to “cooked”), and ὠμοφαγία, eating of raw meat, was believed to be a sign of a wild, uncivilized condition. However, there is indeed a certain difference between eating raw and uncooked food and being “raw” and “uneatable”. The word ὤμός, the initial meaning of which is the last one, can mean both “intractable”, “severe” (not necessarily with bad connotations) and “cruel”, “savage” (with evil connotations). We suppose that in the passage discussed the word is used in the first of these meanings.

The fact that there is nothing “uncivilized” or even “inhuman” about Antigone is apparent, in the first place, because by her deed she supported the civilized practice of burying the dead — the very practice that distinguishes humans from the wild beasts. The proponents of the interpretation discussed would, perhaps, say that this is the core of what they call “tragic ambiguity”, but it is clear that *onus probandi* lies on those who presuppose such extravagant, not to say oxymoronic, ambiguity. The alternative meaning of the word is widespread enough, and nobody has ever proved that it is incongruous in the context.

The best rendering of ὤμός together with an explicit rejection of the wrong interpretation, is provided in Kamerbeek’s commentary: “not, of course, ‘cruel’, but ‘fierce’, ‘intractable’”.¹³ The meaning, which does not presuppose any kind of “savageness”, is, as it has just been stated, by no means rare. For example, in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* (2, 2, 6), ὤμός characterizes a harsh commander, in front of whom even old campaigners trembled as schoolboys in front of a teacher: τὸ γὰρ ἐπίχαρι οὐκ εἶχεν, ἀλλ’ αἰ χαλεπὸς ἦν καὶ ὤμός· ὥστε διέκειντο πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ στρατιῶται ὥσπερ παῖδες πρὸς διδάσκαλον (“for there was no attractiveness about him, but he was always severe and rough, so that the soldiers had the same feeling toward him that boys have toward a schoolmaster”, transl. C. L. Brownson). In Demosthenes ὠμῶς καὶ πικρῶς is used twice in respect to harsh judgment (*contra Arist.* 1, 83, 6; *contra Aph.* 2, 10), and in Isocrates, the same adverb in the superlative form describes the relation of the Salamis rulers to their neighbors (9, 49). There can be nothing “savage” or “uncivilized” about severe leadership style of the Spartan Clearchus, harsh court holding or implacable rulers.

As a side note, comparisons of the heroine with a fractious horse (put in the mouth of Creon, 477–9) and with a bird (by the Guard) cannot possibly prove her “animal” or “subhuman” nature. As for animal metaphors regularly used by Creon, P. J. Griffiths is right in observing that they characterize Creon himself rather than those he speaks about.¹⁴ He uses such metaphors not only towards Antigone: he complains that citizens “don’t want to have their necks under the yoke, as they should” (291–2: οὐδ’ ὑπὸ ζυγῷ / λόφον δικαίως εἶχον), and compares Ismene, who, as he thinks, has conspired with her sister, to a snake (531: ἔχιδνα), who secretly wormed itself into the house, but has finally been caught. The ruler evidently wants to rise above his own kind in the way the generalized Man of the first stasimon rises above animals, domesticated by him and serving his needs. The person characterized by this kind of wording is certainly not Antigone.

As for the comparison with a bird crying over the empty nest (vv. 422–5), there is nothing humiliating or suggesting “subhuman” nature in it. The same comparison is used by Chorus in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (vv. 49–59), this time describing the grief of Atreidae over Helen’s abduction — and, of course, this does not mean that there is anything “subhuman” in Agamemnon or Menelaus. Sophocles himself, in *Electra* (1058–62) uses

¹³ Kamerbeek 1978, ad loc.

¹⁴ Griffiths 1968, 95–97.

the motive of birds' supposed care for their old parents to underline the fact that in human society such natural bonds are often distorted.¹⁵ Moreover, generally speaking, in Greek literature, beginning with Homer, comparison with a bird has exclusively positive connotation and by no means decries human or even divine nature of comparison object. In Homer's writings, gods are often compared with birds; in lyric poetry, an author can compare himself with an eagle of Zeus (Bacch. 5, 16–30) or with a halcyon flying above the waves (Alcm. 26 Page); Plato compares human soul that seeks eternal beauty to a bird looking at the sky (*Phaedr.* 249d).¹⁶

In fact, the above-mentioned interpretation of *Ant.* 471–2 has diagnostic meaning: it has appeared because it is unclear from the context, what is the nature of Antigone's inherited "harshness" and why the Chorus Leader has noticed her likeness to her father at this very moment. I would venture to suppose that the modern reader cannot understand these verses properly because they refer to the play we no longer possess, namely to Aeschylus' *Oedipus*, the second play of his Theban trilogy.

The Chorus Leader explains the meaning of Antigone's hereditary *ωμότης* in the second half of verse 472: she "is unable to surrender to evils" (εἴκειν δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται κακοῖς). In the preceding monologue (463–4), Antigone speaks of her "evils" (κακοῖς) rather vaguely, stressing in the meantime that it is these evils that make her consider death a "profit" (κέρδος) for herself. However, it is clear enough that she means the misfortunes of her family, which both she (1–10) and Ismene (49–58) enumerated already in the prologue. However, while Ismene, being able to surrender to evils, proves her idea of the necessary humbleness with this story (65–68), Antigone, whose situation is virtually the same, comes to the contrary conclusion: she cannot put up with the last desecration of her family which has already been destroyed (9–10).

Therefore, this "inability to surrender to misfortunes" is the very first feature we see in the heroine, and it is underlined by the contrast with her sister. Her hereditary *ωμότης* is the harshness of a person who had already suffered the worst and who had every reason to collapse, to crack, to become milder — but hasn't done so. This is the kind of a hero the Athenian audience had to remember from Aeschylus' *Oedipus*. Here, the protagonist, after his recognition and self-blinding, cursed his sons, and this event was the central one both for this tragedy and for Aeschylus Theban trilogy in general.

Our main sources for the reconstruction of Aeschylus' *Oedipus* are his tragedy *Seven against Thebes* (in the first place vv. 778–87) and a scholion to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (ad v. 1375). According to *Sept.* 787, Oedipus cursed his sons, being ἐπίκοτος τροφᾶς, where τροφή can mean either "origin" (if so, we have to imagine Oedipus cursing his sons for having been born from incestuous intercourse, that is, in fact, for his own involuntary crime)¹⁷ or "feeding, maintenance, care, attendance" (which means that, when Oedipus found himself in a helpless state in care of his sons, they didn't provide necessary maintenance for him).¹⁸ The refusal to perform the duty of γηροτροφία was considered a serious crime, demanding severe punishment (see, for example, Isaeus, *De Cleon.* 39, 5,

¹⁵ Céu Fialho 2013, 108–109.

¹⁶ Kirk 1990, 239–40; Luck-Huyse 1997; Buxton 2004, 139–55; Petridou 2006, 77–81; Bierl, Latacz 2009, 151; Johansson 2012.

¹⁷ Hutchinson 1985, XXV; Bowman 2007, 17; Sommerstein 2013, 84–7.

¹⁸ Griffith 1968, 23; Winnington-Ingram 1977, 37; Zeitlin 1990, 108; Gantz 2007, 45–6; Palladini 2014; Palladini 2015.

Diog. Laert. 1, 55),¹⁹ but one would expect that Oedipus, after all his sufferings, would be broken to such an extent that he wouldn't ask gods to punish the crime committed against himself. However, this was not the case — and this fact was the capstone of Aeschylus' *Oedipus*.

The greatest advantage of the second interpretation of τροφή is that, the brothers caused the curse not by their mere existence, but by a rather grave crime, which makes both of them — and not only Polyneices, who in most versions of the myth plays an unfortunate role of “a bad brother” — responsible for the curse and its consequences.²⁰ As far as we can judge from Orestes' trilogy, this was Aeschylus' approach to the topic of an inherited curse: the more inescapable is the following step of such family's self-destruction, the more important it is to show some personal guilt of each representative of each generation: a spectator shouldn't question the justice of gods.²¹ Of course, this must have been true for the Aeschylean version of Labdacids family story: otherwise, the poet would not have demonstrated so persistently that the curse that forces Eteocles towards the seventh gate, to the inescapable battle with his brother, is identical with his own over-confidence and appetite for revenge.²² Moreover, the understanding of τροφή as “feeding, maintenance, care” conforms better with the testimony of Schol. ad Soph. OC 1375. Here Aeschylus' version (*Septem* mentioned there is surely a mistake for *Oedipus*) is said to conform somehow with that of the lost cyclic *Thebais*, where Oedipus cursed his sons in anger for being offered the wrong portion of sacrificial meat (i. e. for τροφή as “feeding” literally)²³.

The only thing we can say for sure about the plot of Aeschylus' *Oedipus* is that Oedipus cursed his sons during its action: the exact formulation of the curse, which had to explain unclear references in the last tragedy of the trilogy (e. g. *Sept.* 717–27; 785–91; 881–6; 895–9; 941–6), must have been known to the spectator from the previous part.²⁴ The other aspects of the plot, even the question, whether the discovery of the truth by the hero and his self-blinding occurred in this tragedy or outside the plot, remain uncertain. However, Oedipus' curse on his sons evidently formed the central feature of the plot and was one of the crucial events for the trilogy as a whole.

Thus, verses 471–2 of *Antigone* contain reference to Aeschylus' *Oedipus* in particular and to his Theban trilogy in general, which had Oedipus' curse on his sons as its central event (suffice it to recall how often the curse is mentioned and discussed in *Septem*). The fact that Aeschylean trilogy is the main intertext of Sophocles' *Antigone* has been noticed long ago. The younger tragedian borrowed from the elder one both the outline of the plot and the particular ideas, motives, even expressions.²⁵ All these allusions were recognizable to the immediate audience: we possess a well-documented tradition on the wide popularity of Aeschylus and numerous posthumous productions of his plays during the whole 5th century BC (Aristoph. *Acharn.* 9–10, *Nubes* 1364–72, *Lysistr.* 188–9, *Ranae* 868–9 et pas-

¹⁹ Griffith 1968, 39.

²⁰ Winnington-Ingram 1977; Zimmermann 1993, 96; Bruzzese 2010, 191–2, 200–202.

²¹ Dovatur 1977; Rosenmeyer 1982, 284–5.

²² Christian 1977; Rader 2007, 107–23; Winnington-Ingram 1977, 21–22; Garne 2013, 359–360; Sommerstein 2013, 76–77.

²³ The most recent and full discussion of this source, together with extended bibliography, see especially in Palladini 2014 and Palladini 2015.

²⁴ Tucker 1908, XVIII–XIX; Burnett 1973.

²⁵ Griffith 1968, 21–32; Bruzzese 2010; Liapis 2013, 90–95; Dunn 2012, 268–270; 22 and n. 72; Garne 2013, 362; Cairns 2014 (1); Cairns 2014 (2).

sim, *Vita Aesch.* 12, *Schol. ad Aristoph. Acharn.* 10).²⁶ Moreover, the very emergence of the final episode of *Septem* — which is considered spurious by most scholars²⁷ — can serve as an additional testimony to the fact that *Antigone* was perceived as a kind of sequel of Aeschylus' trilogy. This episode contains the discussion of Polyneikes' forthcoming burial (the Herald reports the decision to deny burial for Polyneikes, Antigone proclaims her intention to break the prohibition). The influence of Sophocles' *Antigone* on the unknown author of this episode is self-evident. It is not unlikely that it was written specially for the production of Aeschylus' trilogy that was followed by Sophocles' tragedy.²⁸

The topic of paternal curse, borrowed from the Aeschylean tragedy, is one of the central issues of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. Moreover, in this tragedy, Oedipus' growing awareness of his ability to pronounce this curse and to perform punishment upon his sons is the visible sign of his heroization and apotheosis.²⁹ And it is up to the reader, as it was to the spectator, to decide whether this familial inability to surrender to evils, inherited by Antigone from the hero of the Aeschylus' tragedy and apotheosized in the hero of the last tragedy of Sophocles, is a curse or a blessing.

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²⁶ Müller 1996, 194, and Anm. 2; Bruzzese 2010, 202 and n. 33; Lamari 2014; Hanink, Uhlig 2016.

²⁷ Oberdick 1877; Christ 1890, 183; Diller 1975, 37; Zimmermann 1993, 100–108; Torrance 2007, 19–20; Winnington-Ingram 2009, 2–4; Sommerstein 2013, 90–93.

²⁸ Hanink, Uhlig 2016.

²⁹ Bowman 2007.

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SOPH. ANT. 471 И «ЭДИП» ЭСХИЛА

Зоя Анатольевна Барзах

Статья посвящена интерпретации стихов 471–472 трагедии Софокла «Антигона». Трудность вызывает понимание эпитета *φύος*, отнесенного к героине. Неясно также, в каком смысле упоминается ее отец. Отвергая ставшее популярным в последние десятилетия толкование *φύος* как «дикий»,

нецивилизованный», автор статьи предлагает видеть в указанном пассаже отсылку к несохранившейся трагедии Эсхила «Эдип», а именно к тому её эпизоду, в котором герой проклинал своих сыновей — чем и мотивирована ὥμότης. Согласно свидетельствам, обнаруживаемым в «Семерых» Эсхила (778–87), а равно и в схолиях к Софоклову «Эдипу в Колоне», Этеокл и Полиник лишили отца содержания, когда тот оказался в их власти. По мысли автора, τροφή в указанных стихах Эсхила следует понимать как «забота», «содержание», но не «происхождение». Библиогр. 47 назв.

Ключевые слова: Антигона, Софокл, Эдип, Эсхил, «Семеро против Фив».

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